

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7), a former 3-Star Admiral, released the following statement on passage of H.R. 3159, the Ensuring Military Readiness Through Stability and Predictability Deployment Policy Act of 2007, which would require that active component units and members be provided at least the same time at home as they are deployed, and it would also require that reserve and National Guardsmen who are called to deploy are given at least three times the amount of time at home as they are deployed. The President could waive this requirement due to national security interests: — “This is a tough vote. It is tough because after Vietnam a study showed that if we had kept our troops in Vietnam, like we had in World War II without rotation, we would have been a more effective fighting force with less loss of life. This is because they are more efficient; they are better prepared; and they are better equipped to handle the combat they face because of the growth in experience of staying there.

However, this war in Iraq is different. While the average soldier in World War II was in combat 182 days – during which they faced horrific battles -- there was time in between for rest and restoration. During the 15 months of deployment in Iraq now, our troops go “outside the wire” every day. They are in combat not knowing if the car beside them will explode or whether they will face an IED or be confronted by an attack.

Reports have shown a high number of incidents of those returning from Iraq with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental issues. Given the increasing incidence of PTSD, the army has now begun ensuring that everyone is briefed prior to deployment on the risks of PTSD and how best to confront the medical side of combat.

Therefore I voted for this bill for two reasons:

1. This war is different, with soldiers in constant combat, and we must ensure these soldiers are ready to return prior to redeployment. Congress has a constitutional responsibility to help with this. Article 1, Section 8 invests Congress with the responsibility “to make rules for the government and regulation of all land and naval forces.”
2. This bill then provides a national security waiver for the President to waive the requirements of this bill in the event that he assesses a national security need.

This bill strikes the proper balance between Congress’ constitutional responsibility and ensuring

the President as Commander in Chief has the ability to redeploy our troops at a different pace, even if it is less than the dwell time required by this bill, if national security demands it.

The National Command Authorities (NCA) -- which are the president and the secretary of defense -- are the ultimate lawful source of military orders. Under current law, the NCA must approve the deployment of troops. This bill simply says that in approving the redeployment of our troops they must ensure that dwell time is considered in that decision.

With this said, ending this war in Iraq is necessary but insufficient. How and the means by which we end it is of even greater importance, both to the safety of our troops and to our overall strategic security. It took us 6 months to extract 6,000 troops out of Somalia after Blackhawk Down, and we inserted 17,000 personnel to guard the retreat. We have not only 160,000 troops in Iraq, but over 100,000 civilians. We must ensure their safety, and that will take at a minimum 1 year. Second, that time line of at least a year is actually the change in strategy that will ensure that we have an aftermath -- if we pursue diplomacy with Iran and Syria -- to bring about an un-failed state. Recently the intelligence community said Iran does not want a failed government. Therefore, we must approach the end of this war with a strategic approach working with the Republicans. This is not President Bush's war, but our country's war, because the aftermath of its consequences are so great and it requires a strategic approach to end it."

The Ensuring Military Readiness Through Stability and Predictability Deployment Policy Act of 2007 passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 229 to 194.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to Congress.